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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BF](#) [CARICOM](#)

SUBJECT: CHRISTIE WANTS TO BE THE TONY BLAIR OF CARICOM

Classified By: DCM Robert M. Witajewski, Reasons 1.4 b and d

SUMMARY

1. (C) PM Perry Christie confidant Franklyn Wilson argued during a September 30 luncheon that the U.S. should support Christie's hope to become a regional leader since the Bahamian Prime Minister was America's "Tony Blair" inside Caricom. Wilson again raised the Prime Minister's belief that he was ignored and left exposed by the United States during events surrounding the resignation of Haitian ex-President Aristide and that he should have been consulted by senior USG officials. Wilson claimed, however, that Christie bore "no grudges" at being left out of the loop by the U.S. and Canada.
End Summary

I CAN BE YOUR BLAIR IN THE CARIBBEAN

2. (C) During a small lunch hosted by Ambassador on September 30, prominent Bahamian businessman and Perry Christie financier and confidant Franklyn Wilson argued passionately that Bahamian Prime Minister Perry Christie wanted to become America's "Tony Blair" within Caricom. The luncheon, arranged by the Deputy Chief of Mission, was nominally in honor of the newly-named president of the College of The Bahamas, Rodney Smith.

3. (C) Mr. Wilson emotionally presented the case for Perry Christie, calling him the United States' "best friend" inside Caricom's councils. He said that Christie's personality and manner made it possible for him to become friends with everyone -- including President Bush -- and thereby exert a moderating and calming influence within Caricom to counter the proclivities of that body's more extreme members. Comparing Christie to the country's first PLP prime minister, Sir Lynden Pindling, Wilson declared that back in the early 1970's, many of the region's first post-independence leaders "were a half-step from being communists...preaching socialism and national planning" while Pindling -- misunderstood by the United States -- was, in reality "only a half-step from being a conservative." Pindling, insisted Wilson, quietly and effectively served as a moderating influence during that era and thus served U.S. strategic interests. What was true some thirty years ago, argued Wilson, was equally true today.

4. (C) The United States, continued Wilson, needed to ignore tactical deviations and remember that strategically Perry Christie was America's best friend and supporter in the region. "(The United States) should keep its eye on its (strategic) goal," Wilson declared several times, and should support and enhance Christie's stature within Caricom in its own best self-interest. Just as British Prime Minister Tony Blair was the United States' chief supporter in Europe. DCM pointed out to Wilson that Blair's influence came because he took a leadership role as British Prime Minister despite, not because of, Britain's membership in the EU and that the EU's support of U.S. policies in Iraq and elsewhere have been much more restrained and lukewarm than have Britain's.

MONTHS LATER, STILL CLAIMING NOT TO BE UPSET

5. (C) Addressing the issue of Haiti, Wilson, a long-time Perry Christie supporter and PLP financial backer, yet again claimed that despite feeling that he had been "ignored" by the United States during the departure of Haitian ex-President Jean Bertrand Aristide, Prime Minister Christie harbored no grudges and was not upset. Echoing similar statements from Christie insiders over the months, Wilson did go on to express the view that Christie believes that he was in the forefront of the Caricom effort to persuade the ex-President to peacefully resign his office. Given his leadership role in the effort, argued Wilson, the United States owed it to Christie to have received a call from senior USG officials, or the White House, advising him "when the United States decided to change direction on Aristide" and "remove him from power." DCM reminded Mr. Wilson that he

had been briefed on the rapid spiral of breaking events that weekend, noted -- again -- that Caricom was not an organization well suited to handling crises, and that given the press of events that Saturday night/Sunday morning, it was unrealistic to have expected the Secretary or the President to have phoned thirteen heads of government to brief them on rapidly-breaking events. Wilson responded that Christie had at least been able to have his call to the Canadian Prime Minister returned by "Canada's Condolecia (sic) Rice."

16. (U) Echoing PM Christie's position, and reflecting continuing Bahamian Government skepticism about Aristide's departure, in his speech to the UN General Assembly September 30, Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell similarly claimed that "No one will ever know what truly happened on that night as an elected president left his country with armed rebels nipping at his heels, but it filled the entire Caribbean with sadness. It has raised the spectre of mistrust between friends."

CHRISTIE ADDRESSING AMERICAS CONFERENCE

17. (C) Noting that Prime Minister Christie was scheduled to be the principal speaker at a morning session October 1 at the Miami Herald's annual Americas Conference, Ambassador expressed the hope that the Prime Minister would take a positive position that reflected the deep, long-standing, and overall positive relationship between the United States and the region.

18. (C) The theme of Christie's remarks at the conference are "Friend or Foe? Can the Caribbean and the U.S. Repair Their Damaged Relations?" Speaking with DCM at the Chinese National Day reception September 30, shortly before flying to Miami, Christie feigned surprise and dismay "at the topic they assigned me." DCM took the opportunity to reiterate Ambassador's hope that he would use his spotlight to focus on the overwhelmingly positive bilateral and mutually beneficial multilateral regional relationship and not engage in an unproductive negative analysis.

COMMENT

19. (C) Franklyn Wilson is one of the wealthiest black Bahamians. He has been closely identified with the PLP throughout his entire life and holds The Bahamas' first post-independent Prime Minister, Sir Lynden Pindling, in a status close to sainthood. He is a member of the Christie "kitchen cabinet." Wilson's wife, Sharon, is president of the Bahamian Senate. Wilson is also one of the PLP's principal financiers and fund raisers. He is accustomed to serving as a transmission belt both to send, and to receive, messages intended for the Prime Minister.

10. (C) Months after ex-President Aristide's departure, that both Prime Minister Perry Christie and Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell continue to volunteer denials that they don't feel "dissed" and left hanging on a limb by not being consulted by the United States during the hours leading up to Aristide's departure after they took what they perceive to be a leading role in advocating the U.S. position within Caricom, are as convincing as Caesar's thrice refusal of Rome's imperial crown. Christie's spotlight at the Miami Herald conference will give him the opportunity to advance his long-expressed desire to assume a role as Caricom's leading statesman. Whether he will take full advantage of this opportunity remains to be seen.

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